

Washington, D.C. – To create a more effective highway bridge inspection system and invest in needed repairs on thousands of structurally deficient bridges, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) voted for – and the House passed by a vote of 367-55 – the National Highway Bridge Reconstruction and Inspection Act (HR 3999). The bill strengthens inspection requirements and standards, and authorizes \$1 billion to pay for reconstruction costs in Fiscal Year 2009, adding this funding to resources allocated under the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act (SAFETEA-LU). — “We need to take responsibility for making certain that Americans feel as safe as possible on the roadways and that every possible precaution is taken to avoid an incident like the bridge collapse in Minnesota last year,” said Congressman Sestak. “This legislation includes critical provisions for proper inspection of bridges and takes immediate, necessary action to keep Americans safe. Pennsylvania alone has nearly 6,000 structurally deficient bridges, the most of any state, and receives \$97 million through this bill. There is more work to do on this issue, but this is an important step.”

One of the many inspection requirements in the bill mandates an immediate update of the National Bridge Inspection Standards by the Federal Highway Administration. In addition, states must inspect all structurally deficient bridges every year and all other bridges every two years. Since more than half of bridges have existed since before 1964, it is increasingly important to have reliable information on the safety of these structures.

Today’s vote also addresses the need to have qualified individuals providing the status of bridge safety. Currently, no Federal standard or training requirement exists for front-line inspectors. This bill increases qualification requirements, ensuring that licensed professional engineers approve the inspection of highway bridges.

In addition to improving inspection, the bill requires the Department of Transportation to develop a system in which it will assign a risk-based priority to repair, rehabilitate or replace each structurally deficient or functionally obsolete Federal-aid highway bridge. The National Academy of Sciences will conduct an independent review of the process and states will institute a five-year plan for not only inspecting their highway bridges, but also repairing those that are not structurally adequate.

“Addressing our nation’s bridges is an important part of a larger goal of improving our nation’s infrastructure,” said Congressman Sestak. “The National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission made clear in its report earlier this year that our aging surface transportation system cannot manage future needs and that a major increase in Federal funding

is imperative. Investing in this type of legislation also has the added benefit of stimulating the economy with new jobs, such as the nearly 35,000 that would be created by the \$1 billion authorization in this bill.”

Funds provided by this bill are to be distributed by formula as designed by Federal-aid highway apportionments as part of the Highway Bridge Program. The bill prohibits any congressional or Administration earmarks to be provided under this program. Furthermore, these resources are not transferable to other Federal-aid highway programs.

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.